



THE CHANGE AGENT

Adult Education for
Social Justice: News,
Issues, and Ideas

COMING HOME FROM WAR

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Advocate for Your Loved One

Yolanda Galloway

I want to reach out to folks who have a loved one coming home after being injured in war. This is my story. My son was eighteen, right out of high school, when he decided to join the military. He was deployed to Iraq for three of the four years he was in the military.

Every parent of a veteran knows how it feels when we hear on the news of soldiers being injured or killed. Our hearts

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skip a beat. When I got the dreaded call from the military hospital in Germany, one of my worst fears had come true. He had been badly burned in an explosion and they would be transporting him

Don't take it personally if [your veteran] is angry. You are all he's got. Who's going to advocate for our veterans except us?

back to the states. I spoke to my son on the phone. All he could say was, "Mom when I look down at my missing skin, I can't believe this is happening." I went to meet my son at a military base in Texas. The military made sure I had free room and board on base. When I first saw my son he was highly medicated for pain. I watched in horror as he revealed his wounds to me during the time they needed to be dressed. The doctors explained that he suffered from second and third degree burns on his face and arms. They suggested he have skin grafts on his arms. My son said he didn't want to have them, but he was not in his right mind. He was under the influence of morphine. The doctors told him it would heal fine without a skin graft.

However, months after the injury, he developed very painful and unsightly scars. Now he wishes he had gotten the surgery he needed. I urge any parent or loved one who has an injured veteran in their life to advocate strongly for their loved one while they are undergoing recovery. Do as much research and communicating with the doctor as you possibly can. And for goodness sake, don't listen to your highly medicated veteran when he says no to sensible alternatives. Remember he is not himself. Don't take it personally if he is angry. You are all he's got. Who's going to advocate for our veterans when they are at their weakest except us?

After being granted a medical discharge, my son had to fight for the benefits he was due as a disabled veteran. They buried him under a barrage of paper work and kept asking for more proof to substantiate his injuries. He was so depressed. He

had to work three jobs to make ends meet. He was limited in his career choices because of his injuries. After a two-year battle, he was finally awarded his benefits.

It is not right that veterans should have to wait so long for benefits. They risk their lives for this country and are injured for life. Then they have to come back and fight for their rights. My prayers go out to all the families who have lost loved ones.



Yolanda Galloway lives in Dorchester, MA. She is an active member of her community and supports her two sons and granddaughter.

Advocating for Veterans

Contact the Veterans' Administration or a local Veterans' Center to find out about what resources are available.

Find information and support via independent veterans' groups, such as Vets 4 Vets <www.vets4vets.us>, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America <<http://iava.org>>, and Iraq Veterans Against the War <ivaw.org>.

Reach out to other families at Military Families Speak Out <www.mfso.org>.

What responsibility does our government have toward veterans? What responsibility do we, as members of U.S. society, have toward veterans? To explore these questions further, see articles on pp. 38-41.

